

LIV.—*Letter—Obituary.*

WE have received the following letter, addressed “to the Editors of ‘The Ibis’” :—

SIRS,—When recently looking over my collection of Chats, I made the following interesting discovery, which seems to have hitherto escaped the notice of ornithologists, viz., that there are two very distinct forms of the Black-eared Chat (*Saxicola aurita* Temm.), one being of the described type, occurring in South-eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and North-eastern Africa, while the other, which is apparently undescribed, occurs in South-western Europe and North-western Africa.

The points of difference between these two forms are, I think, of sufficient importance to justify the specific separation of one from the other, being, in fact, precisely those occurring between the two very closely-allied species *S. melanoleuca* and *S. stapanina* (*vide* Ibis, 1895, p. 93), with the exception, of course, of the black throat-band, more extended in the former than in the latter.

The Western Black-eared Chat differs from the Eastern bird in the following respects :—

- (a) The black of the lores does not extend over the base of the bill in a narrow frontal band, this point being of a creamy-white colour, the same as the rest of the crown.
- (b) The scapulars are cream-coloured, and not black.
- (c) The under surface of the wings, both primaries and secondaries, is of a light colour, sometimes quite white, instead of being black.

The adult male of the Western bird moreover does not seem to assume, as a rule, the silvery-white plumage on the head and back found in adult examples of *S. aurita* in spring, but remains always more or less cream-coloured.

On the other hand, the Western bird is generally whiter on the throat and underparts than the Eastern bird.

In some specimens of the Western form there is very little black on the lores, some examples indeed having none at all, although probably this is exceptional.

The measurements and soft parts are the same in both forms. As in the case of the two species of Black-throated Chat, the meeting-point of the two species of Black-eared Chat is probably, roughly speaking, about the 10th degree of East longitude. From Tunis I have both forms, although the Western is by far the commoner of the two; in fact, out of some 20 specimens in my collection, only one is of the Eastern form. All my specimens from Algeria and Marocco are of the Western form.

I propose to name this Chat *SAXICOLA CATERINÆ*, sp. nov.

I also have a Crossbill from Tunis, which I consider sufficiently distinct from *Loxia curvirostra* to be separated from it as a subspecies, and I therefore propose to name and describe it as follows:—

*LOXIA CURVIROSTRA POLIOGYNA*, subsp. nov.

Similar to *L. curvirostra*, but differs from that species in being paler and greyer, this character being more conspicuous in the female, which is almost entirely grey, and not green or greenish, as is the female of the Common Crossbill. This is a perfectly constant character, as shown by a large series of specimens, all exactly alike. Adult male birds, owing to the colour of their plumage, naturally show the difference less than the females; but immature males, as well as young birds of the year in the spotted stage of plumage, show it distinctly. The bill is as in *L. curvirostra*, as are also the measurements generally, and the present bird therefore can scarcely be Von Homeyer's *L. balearica*, whatever that may have been.

The Tunisian Crossbill is to be found in the woods of Aleppo-pine in the central districts of the Regency, where it is resident and fairly abundant. It is, no doubt, a good example of a geographical or climatic race, the plumage of birds generally in Tunisia having a tendency to become pale.

Yours &c.,

J. I. S. WHITAKER.